United Nations A/56/187

General Assembly

Distr.: General
12 July 2001
English
Original: Arabic/English/Spanish

Fifty-sixth session
Item 83 of the preliminary list*
Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East

Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General**

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* A/56/50.
** The present report includes replies received from Member States up to July 2001.
*** On behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the European Union.

01-45925 (E) 140801 240801

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 10 of its resolution 55/30 of 20 November 2000, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to pursue consultations with the States of the region of the Middle East and other concerned States, in accordance with paragraph 7 of resolution 46/30 of 6 December 1991 and taking into account the evolving situation in the region, and to seek from those States their views on the measures outlined in chapters III and IV of the study annexed to his report (A/45/435) or other relevant measures, in order to move towards the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. In paragraph 11 of the same resolution, the Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-sixth session a report on the implementation of the resolution. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

2. On 16 February 2001, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to all Member States drawing attention to paragraph 10 of resolution 55/30 and seeking the views of Member States on the matter. Replies were received from Belgium (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the European Union), Egypt, Mexico and the Syrian Arab Republic. The text of those replies is reproduced in section III below and any additional replies from Member States will be issued in an addendum to the present report.

II. Observations

3. The issue of the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East continues to be high on the agenda of the international community. In that context, measures with regard to the Middle East, especially the implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, were included in the Final Document[1] of the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons ("the Non-Proliferation Treaty"), which was adopted by consensus. The agreements reached also reaffirmed the broad measure of support for the establishment of such a zone in the region of the Middle East. It is to be regretted that no further progress has been achieved since.

4. The Secretary-General has on several occasions carried out various consultations with concerned parties within and outside the region in order to explore further ways and means of promoting the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, taking into account the evolving situation in the region as well as the continuing efforts by the Arab States to establish such a zone. It is clear that the realization of that goal requires the participation of all States of the region, as well as other interested States, including the nuclear-weapon States. Adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty[2] and full implementation of its provisions are essential steps towards that goal. The Secretary-General firmly believes that the multilateral Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security could play a useful role as a forum for discussing a broad range of arms control, disarmament and confidence-building measures, including the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region. It is therefore important that the parties of the region and other States concerned reach an early agreement on a comprehensive agenda for the Working Group so that it can commence formal activities as soon as possible. The Secretary-General calls on all concerned to review the situation in order to resume discussions with a view to developing practical concepts aimed at reaching a common position. The Secretary-General also reaffirms the continued readiness of the United Nations to provide any assistance deemed helpful in that regard.

III. Replies received from Governments

Belgium*

[Original: English]
[16 July 2001]

1. The European Union recalls the guidelines on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, adopted by the Disarmament Commission at its 1999 session,[3] stipulating that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones should be based on arrangements freely arrived at by the States of the region.

2. The European Union also takes note of Security Council resolution 687 (1991), recalling the goal of

* On behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the European Union.

establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery.

3. The European Union further recalls the conclusion of the report of the Secretary-General of 10 October 1990 (A/45/435) that the nuclear threat can be effectively and permanently eliminated only as a pattern of sound regional security relationships is developed.

4. The European Union recognizes the importance of confidence-building measures, such as nuclear-weapon-free zones, as an integral part of a comprehensive, regional security arrangement, based on peaceful and friendly relations between all States in the Middle East. The Union stresses that the creation of a secure and stable environment for all States, which would facilitate the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction, is first and foremost the responsibility of the States in the Middle East.

5. The European Union has repeatedly called on all States to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and recalls the decisions and the resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference. The Union equally attaches great importance to the universal adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (General Assembly resolution 50/245, annex), the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction,[4] the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (resolution 2826 (XXVI), annex), and to agreements between States and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for the application of safeguards with additional protocols, and considers those treaties and agreements to be in the best interest of all States, as they constitute important steps to promoting non-proliferation and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, thereby contributing to international and regional confidence, stability and peace.

6. The European Union urges the States of the region to devote themselves to efforts to develop peaceful and friendly relations, with a view to creating a secure and stable environment for all States in the region, thereby rendering possible the establishment of a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery in the Middle East.

Egypt

[Original: English
[18 July 2001]

1. Egypt's commitment to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East is unquestionable. It was at the request of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Egypt that the item entitled "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East" was first inscribed on the agenda of the General Assembly in 1974. Since that date, the Assembly has annually adopted a resolution, by consensus since 1980, on the matter. Throughout the years, Egypt continued to play a consistently leading role in promoting the objective of ridding the Middle East of the threat of nuclear weapons.

2. As a State party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and a signatory to the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (the Pelindaba Treaty), Egypt has clearly and unambiguously demonstrated its rejection of the nuclear option, which represents a major threat to peace, security and stability in the Middle East. Today, Egypt notes that all States of the Middle East have become parties to the NPT with the exception of Israel, which regrettably persists in ignoring repeated calls to join the Treaty and to place all its nuclear facilities under IAEA full-scope safeguards, thereby perpetuating a dangerous imbalance in the region.

3. The importance given during the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East is yet another testimony to the commitment of the international community to the establishment of such a zone in the region. Further to the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, the 2000 Review Conference adopted unanimously in its final document a reaffirmation for the importance of Israel's accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards. The Conference recalled that in paragraph 4 of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East it had called upon all States in the Middle East that had not yet done so, without exception, to accede to the Treaty as soon as possible

and to place their nuclear facilities under full-scope IAEA safeguards. The Conference noted, in that connection, that the report of the United Nations Secretariat on the implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East stated that several States had acceded to the Treaty and that, with those accessions, all States of the region of the Middle East, with the exception of Israel, were States parties to the Treaty. The Conference welcomed the accession of those States and reaffirmed the importance of Israel's accession to the Treaty and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under the comprehensive IAEA safeguards in realizing the goal of universal adherence to the Treaty in the Middle East.

4. Egypt is cognizant of the fact that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East is a difficult task. Indeed, each region of the world has its own characteristics and each zone must be tailored to suit those characteristics. However, Egypt does not share the view that full-scale peace and fully developed political and economic relations between all States of the region are a prerequisite for the commencement of negotiations on the establishment of a zone. If such an argument was correct, it is unlikely that the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean ("the Treaty of Tlatelolco")[5] or even the Treaty of Pelindaba would ever have been negotiated. Regrettably, conflicts continue to rage in various parts of Africa to this very day, yet such conflicts were not invoked as reasons to prevent negotiations on an African nuclear-weapon-free zone. To Egypt, experience has shown that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in areas of tension and conflicts does indeed contribute to easing tensions, preventing conflicts and developing peaceful relations and mutual cooperation.

5. For a nuclear-weapon-free zone to be established in any area of the world, there must inevitably exist a regional commitment to that objective. Such a commitment is unquestionably present in the Middle East, as is testified to by the annual adoption of a consensus resolution of the General Assembly on the matter and by the adoption of consensus guidelines by the Disarmament Commission at its 1999 substantive session on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned. In that connection, Egypt notes with satisfaction that there is agreement that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East as well as the development of a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction should be encouraged. Egypt considers that it is imperative that those commitments be turned into concrete actions if it is to have a determining and positive impact on the Middle East peace process.

6. Making negotiations on a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone contingent upon an ever growing list of prerequisites is a sure recipe for failure. In Egypt's view, the only prerequisite for negotiations to commence on the establishment of a zone in the Middle East is that States in the region have the political will to sit together and commence negotiations. Viewing the Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone as no more than an act that "sets the seal on a durable peace" is not a vision that is shared by Egypt. A Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone is in and of itself an important confidence-building measure and an act of political reconciliation. Furthermore, arguing that fully fledged relations of peace must exist before talks on such a zone can commence, while at the same time persisting to maintain a nuclear option, clearly appear as two mutually exclusive and contradictory arguments. In a region as volatile as the Middle East no solid and durable peace can be achieved while a nuclear threat continues to loom over the region.

7. Egypt will continue to pursue the objective of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East at the earliest time and will, in that context, continue to seek the support of regional and extraregional States. Furthermore, Egypt will continue its endeavours to realize the objective of establishing such a zone based on the outcome of the 2000 Review Conference. It will also pursue its April 1990 initiative for the establishment, in the Middle East, of a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction. In its endeavours, it will continue to seek the support of the international community and of all those who are committed to ridding the world, at both the regional and the global level, of the threat of nuclear weapons.

Mexico

[Original: Spanish]
[7 June 2001]

1. Mexico considers that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones is an effective parallel way

of strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime. It noted with interest that the sixth Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty invited States, in particular in the Middle East, to reaffirm their support for practical steps towards the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in that region.

2. The initiative on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East is in line with article VII of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which recognizes the right of States to conclude regional treaties in order to assure the total absence of nuclear weapons in their respective territories. The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones ensures the elimination of the threat that such devices represent and helps to preserve international peace and security on a trustworthy basis, especially in regions where tension exists.

3. At the 1995 Review and Extension Conference, Mexico endorsed the need for specific steps to ensure the full implementation of the provisions of the resolution on the Middle East. Implementation of that resolution is a pressing commitment of the States parties to the Treaty and accordingly the Final Document of the sixth Review Conference notes that the broadening and the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at, especially in zones of tension such as the Middle East, represent a significant contribution towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

4. Mexico welcomes the fact that the resolution on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East was adopted unanimously.

Syrian Arab Republic

[Original: Arabic]
[15 May 2001]

1. The Syrian Arab Republic has always affirmed its strong commitment to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. It expresses its deep concern at the fact that Israel represents an insurmountable obstacle preventing the establishment of such a zone by its refusal to accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It still maintains that refusal despite the international community's repeated admonition that its intransigent position is causing great damage to the credibility and universality of the Treaty and that it is, in practice, preventing the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East regardless of the good faith of the other parties involved and of the various formulas proposed.

2. The Syrian Arab Republic is of the view that measures for the establishment of the nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East for which the relevant United Nations resolutions have called will require:

(a) That Israel, the only country in the region that possesses nuclear installations and a nuclear stockpile, should accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, place all of its nuclear installations under the comprehensive safeguards regime of IAEA and eliminate its entire stockpile of nuclear weapons, all as an indispensable desideratum for the establishment of the zone;

(b) That the United Nations provide the proper framework for serious talks to facilitate joint action by the countries concerned in the Middle East for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Notes

[1] NPT/CONF.2000/28 (Parts I and II).

[2] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 729, No. 10485.

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 42* (A/54/42), annex I, sect. C.

[4] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 27* (A/47/27), appendix I.

[5] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 634, No. 9068.